DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 377 422 CG 025 705

AUTHOR Freedman, Susan A.
TITLE Speaking of Gender Identity: Theoretical Approaches.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 22p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Patterns; Biological Influences; Feminism; *Identification (Psychology); Lesbianism; Psychological Characteristics; Sex Differences; *Sex Role; Sex Stereotypes; *Sexual Identity; Social Behavior; *Social Development; Social Influences

ABSTRACT

Various definitions of gender identity have ranged from recognition of one's biological sex to an individual's sense of masculinity or femininity. For the purpose of this paper, which examines some of the theoretical approaches to the subject, gender identity will be defined as "the degree to which individuals are 'aware' of and accept their biological sex." Psychoanalytic or identification theories emphasize individual personality development, while social structural theories examine the way in which society creates and supports gender roles. Evolutionary theories have stressed possible genetic and functional bases for behavioral differences between the sexes. Other theories focus on "how" gender differences occur, rather than "why" they occur. Social learning theory proposes that both gender identity and gender role are learned through a process including observation, imitation, punishment, and reinforcement. Cognitive developmental theory proposes that the concept of gender cannot be learned until the child reaches a certain stage of development. Gender schema theory proposes that individuals with strongly developed gender schemas will spontaneously sort information into categories based on gender. Social interaction theories are concerned with the processes that maintain continuity of gender-related behavior and that elicit such behaviors in specific social contexts. Contains 37 references. (BF)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 377 422

Speaking of Gender Identity:

Theoretical Approaches

Susan A. Freedman

Psychology Department

The Pennsylvania State University

Running Head: GENDER IDENTITY

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

CG025705

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. FREEDMAN

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Gender Identity

Various definitions of Gender Identity have ranged from recognition of one's biological sex to an individual's sense of masculinity or femininity. Fleishman's (1983) psychodynamic definition provides an example of one end of this continuum: "Gender identity refers to an individual's belief that he or she is either male or female". (p. 1055). Representative of a definition falling more toward the middle of the continuum is (O'Heron, C. & Orlofsky, J. L., 1990) the definition of gender identity as that which "refers not only to an individual's sense of self as a man or a women but also to his or her global sense of masculinity or femininity". Thus, although most definitions do fall somewhere between these two, discussions of gender identity may directly encompass biological sex, conformity to social stereotypes, sexual preference, political ideology and activism - explicitly or implicitly. These definitions will influence what topics are included in discussions of gender identity, which may range from recognition of biological sex, transsexualism, hermaphroditism, and sex reassignment to gender role, sextyping or gender ideology. Chodorow (1987) proposed an elegant

definition of gender identity which is representative of those falling toward the middle of this continuum:

> "a cognitive sense of gendered self...established in the first two years, concomitantly with the establishment of the sense of self. Later evaluations of the desirability of one's gender and of the activities and modes of behaving associated with it, or of one's own sense of adequacy at fulfilling gender-role expectation, are built upon this fundamental gender identity. They do not create or change it. Most people develop an unambiguous core gender identity, a sense that they are female or male." (p.259)

For the purpose of this paper, gender identity will be defined simply as "the degree to which individuals are *aware* [italics added] of and accept their biological sex..."(Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 12)

Several theorists (e.g. Basow, 1992; Lips, 1988, 1993) have attempted to sort theoretical perspectives related to gender identity into categories. This task is more difficult than it might be, in part because distinctions between the terms *gender role, sextyping, gender identity,* and *sexual orientation* are often not explicitly stated. *Gender role* refers to socially prescribed behaviors which are appropriate for one's sex.

Sextyping refers to the degree to which an individual conforms to one's gender role. *Sexual orientation* refers to an individual's preference for same-sex or opposite-sex sexual partners. As noted by Hilary Lips (1993) "Researchers now acknowledge, however, that the three issues gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation) are conceptually separate and, in fact, not necessarily correlated. *Gender identity* is defined as the individual's private experience of the self as female or male - a powerful aspect of the self-concept that is formed early in childhood, and in most adults, extremely resistant to change." (p.49).

Hilary Lips (1988) has divided various theories related to gender identity into five groups, and more recently (1993) into six groups, which fall into two major categories. The first three groups (psychoanalytic/identification, social structural, and evolutionary) focus on *why* the sexes may differ. Other theories (Social Learning, Cognitive Development, and Social Interaction) focus on *how* gender differences occur, stressing processes through which males and females may come to adopt similar or dissimilar ways of being. Her distinction between how and why theories has been retained here, but others theories have been fitted into her model.

Psychoanalytic or identification theories emphasize individual personality development (Chodorow, 1989; Freud, 1925/1974; Horney, 1926/1973). Particular importance is place on the early parent-child relationships. Identification theories of why differences between the sexes occurred - such as those presented by Freud, (1925/1974), Horney, (1926/1973), and Chodorow, (1989) - made few explicit distinctions between gender identity, gender role, and sexual orientation; all three were considered aspects of identification with the same-sex parent.

Although Freud (1925/1974) thought that women faced greater obstacles to developing gender identity, later theorists argued that boys faced greater difficulty (Chodorow, 1978, 1987, 1989; Dinnerstein, 1976). Freud's analysis of the Oedipal trauma emphasized the difficulties faced by girls in developing a gender identity. Chodorow (1978) suggested that exclusively female parenting produces women and men with different emotional needs. Women, she says, will unsuccessfully attempt to replicate (in adult relationships) the sense of unity with another that they experienced as children with a same sex parent (with whom they identified). She further argued (1989) that as a result of caretaking

carried out primarily by females, boys initially identify with the mother. They must then form a masculine identity based on separation and denial, defining themselves as "not women".

Social structural theories (e.g. Lips, 1991) examine the way in which society creates and supports gender roles rather than the way in which individuals come to develop individual gender identity. These theories focus on the socio-cultural context; how relations between women and men are linked to gender roles and sex stereotypes, and the social structures which support these roles and stereotypes. Power and status differences are seen as crucial factors in developing and maintaining differences between men and women.

Evolutionary theories of gender have stressed possible genetic and functional bases for behavioral differences between the sexes. Thus, gender identity as defined here ("the degree to which individuals are *aware* [italics added] of and accept their biological sex..."(Spence & Helmreich, 1978, p. 12) is ignored by these approaches, although they are commonly included in discussions of gender identity (e.g. Lips, 1988, 1993). These approaches argue that observed differences have arisen through evolution and are biologically adaptive. Thus the power

differences are not the result of culture or socialization, but are biologically, genetically inevitable.

Other theories (Social Learning, Cognitive Development, and Social Interaction) focus on "how" gender differences occur, rather than "why" they occur (Lips, 1993). These three categories stress the processes through which males and females may come to adopt similar or dissimilar ways of being. These theories distinguish more clearly between gender identity and other gender related constructs than do the theories which examine why men and women differ. They also place greater importance on the individual's subjective experience of gender identity than do either the social structural theories or the evolutionary theories of gender differences.

Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) proposes that both gender identity and gender role are learned through a process including observation, imitation, punishment, and reinforcement. This model supposes that parents and others map out gender roles for the child, who is differentially reinforced for sex-typed behaviors. As the boy or girl is repeatedly rewarded for sex-typed behaviors, it becomes rewarding to think of oneself as a boy or a girl. Sex-typing (the conformity to and

adoption of a socially prescribed gender-role) precedes and forms the basis for development of gender identity.

Cognitive developmental theory (e.g. Kolhberg, 1966) argues that sextyping occurs as a result of gender identity formation. This approach proposes that the concept of *gender* cannot be learned until the child reaches a certain stage of development. Between the ages of 3 and 5 years, the child acquires "gender constancy". This is the understanding that a person's gender is fixed, regardless of changes in hairstyle or clothing.

According to this approach, once the child has classified the self as male or female, sex-typed behaviors will become more reinforcing than gender-inappropriate behaviors. Several researchers have found that sex-typing occurs before the age of gender constancy (Downs, 1983; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Urberg, 1982). Money and Erhardt's (1972) research indicates that reassigning a child's sex after age 2 proves problematic, suggesting that some aspects of gender identity are already formed at that time. Nevertheless, theories integrating and extending social learning and cognitive developmental approaches include gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1985), "sex role as rule"

theory (Constantinople, 1979) and "gender roles as developmental pathways" (Archer, 1984). Although often included in discussions of gender identity, (e.g. Basow, 1992; Lips, 1988, 1993) these theories do not explicitly distinguish between gender identity and related constructs such as sex-typing or gender role acquisition.

Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981, 1985) proposes that individuals with strongly developed gender schemas will spontaneously sort information into categories based on gender. She argues that strongly sex-typed individuals are those who have a strong tendency toward gender schematic processing. This theory suggests that individual differences in gender schematicity result from the extent to which the gender dichotomy was emphasized during childhood. Although not explicitly stated, it is implicit in this theory that a gender identity is developed concurrently with an individual's sex-typing (itself a result of gender schematicity).

Constantinople's (1979) model (similar to gender schema theory), suggests that children learn to generate gender categories through two stages of gender schema development. First, the child uses data-driven information processing in which categories are formed as the child

encounters new information. Once these categories are being formed, the child will use concept driven information processing in which the integration of incoming information is guided by these categories. She suggested that gender-role consolidation occurs at the same time as does the acquisition of stable gender identity in Kohlberg's (1966) theory.

Spence (1985) proposed a more multidimensional concept of gender identity to replace the somewhat limiting concept of sex-typing. Building these earlier multifactorial approaches to gender identity, she wrote that:

> "..there is considerable variability within each sex as to the particular constellation of gender-congruent qualities people display. Despite this heterogeneity, most members of both sexes develop a clear sense of gender identity, that is, a clear sense of belongingness to their own sex...the theory denies the validity of such all-encompassing constructs as sex role orientation, gender schematization, or Masculinity-Femininity based on the assumption that specific sex-linked behaviors and qualities contribute to a single factor..." (Spence, 1993, p.625).

Thus, a phenonmenological sense of one's femaleness or maleness

would come to replace conformity to stereotypical personality traits. One can have a strong gender identity as a woman and still demonstrate assertive or even aggressive behaviors.

Social interaction process theories focus on the display and maintenance of gender related behaviors rather than the childhood acquisition of gender identity. This contrasts with social learning and cognitive development theories, both of which emphasize childhood learning as a basis for lifelong gender roles. Thus, social interaction theories are concerned with the processes that maintain continuity of gender-related behavior and that elicit such behaviors in specific social contexts. One example of such approaches is provided in the interactive model of gendered behavior presented by Deaux and Major (1987). Theories of gender identity based on group identification (Allport, 1954; Sherif & Sherif, 1956) and social identity (Tajfel, (1981, 1984) theories could be said to represent a second category of social interaction theories.

Deaux and Major (1987) presented a model relevant to gender identity that radically departed from the others described here. This model examines the interaction with the immediate social environment

which influences the display of gender-related behaviors. Rather than examining long-term causes of gendered behavior, this theory implies that individuals have already defined their gender identity. This approach takes into account the ways in which individual's may depart from their sex-typed behaviors and still retain a secure gender identity.

Theories of group identification (Allport, 1954; Sherif & Sherif, 1956) and social identity (Tajfel, (1981, 1984) argue that an individual's identity or sense of self is largely constructed of perceived links to specific reference groups. Identity is thus defined and enhanced by the sense of being different from other groups. Gender identity models which build on these theories offer the opportunity to discuss and examine gender identity as separate and distinct from other gender related constructs such as sextyping, gender schematicity, and gender role. In this way, they are similar to Spence's (1993) multidimensional model of phenomenological gender identity.

Social identity theories of gender identity focus not on why or how the child comes to acquire a gender identity, but rather the salience and value attached to that portion of social identity. Tajfel's social identity theory (1978) provides a structure for examining gender identity as one

of several social identities. This approach proposes that identity emerges from within a context of intergroup relations. Thus, one comes to define oneself as a member of a given in-group in comparison to an out-group.

The first models discussed here to functionally separate gender identity from sex-typing or gender ideology are approached from the social identity framework (Gurin & Markus, 1989; Branscombe, Owen, & Kobrynowicz, 1993). These models allow for what Spence (1993) described as considerable "heterogeneity" in "gender congruent qualities" (p.625) among individuals with secure gender identities, by clearly delineating salience of gender category from the dimension of sextyping (conformity to stereotyped expectations). However, it could be argued that both of these definitions of gender identity (especially that of Branscombe et al, 1993), while differentiated from sex-typing, are possibly confounded with gender ideology. If a sense of common fate with other women is defined as part of feminist identity, it is clear that both definitions of gender identity below share some overlap with the definition of feminist identity.

Gurin and Markus (1989) define gender identity as "an internal

representation of belonging to the social category, women" (p.153), hypothesizing that "gender identity depends on (1) how central being a woman is to the self-structure, and (2) the extent to which a woman has a sense of common fate with other women. We assume that the cognitive consequences of gender identity are dependent on where women locate themselves in socially structured gender roles - whether they have traditional or non-traditional work and family roles." (p.253). Thus, these authors present of gender identity as distinct and separate from conformity to gender role (sex-typing) which was earlier seen as both a cause and a consequence of gender identity (e.g. Gurin, 1985).

Branscombe, Owen, and Kobrynowicz (1993) define gender identification as including: "1) favoring ingroup members; 2) emotional attachment; 3) typicality; 4) knowledge; and 5) sense of common fate. This definition does, perhaps show even greater overlap with possible definitions of feminist identity. Perhaps that was the intent.

The fact that it is so difficult to cleanly separate gender identity from other gender related constructs such as sex-type, gender-related qualities, gender ideology, and gender role, may provide us with a clue to it's way of existing. That is, these related constructs may in fact be

closely tied to individual's sense of gender identity. Thus, traditional women may feel that they define and make salient their gender identity through sex-typing, conformity to the socially prescribed roles for women. Feminist women may do this through political action, or through rejection of the restraints of gender roles. Sexual orientation may be differentially related to gender identity for Lesbian and heterosexual women.

Clear advances have been made in defining and discussing gender identity, which initially included sextype, gender ideology, and sexual orientation. Differentiation between gender identity and sexual orientation has perhaps been most successfully accomplished in theory and in research. It remains to see if this division or separation describes the realities of Lesbian women. More recently, theorists have attempted to differentiate between gender identity and both sextype and gender ideology.

References

Archer, J. (1984). Gender roles as developmental pathways. British Journal of Social Psychology, 23, 245-256.

Allport, G. W. (1954). The nature of prejudice. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Bandura, A. (1977). Social learning theory. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Basow, S. A. (1992). Gender: Stereotypes and roles (3rd ed.). Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks & Cole.

Bem, S. L. (1981). Gender schema theory: A cognitive account of sex typing. Psychological Review, 88, 354-364.

Bem, S. L. (1985). Androgyny and gender schema theory: A conceptual and empirical integration. In T. B. Sonderegger (Ed.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Psychology of Gender (pp. 179-226). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Bem, S. L. (1987). Is androgyny a solution?, (pp. 206-245) in M. Roth Walsh (Ed.), The psychology of Women: ongoing debates.

Branscombe, N. R., Owen, S., & Kobrynowicz, d. (1993, August). Measuring identification with one's gender group in women and men. Paper presented at the Convention of the American Psychological Association, Toronto, Canada.

Chodorow, N. (1978). The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chodorow, N. (1987). Feminism and difference: gender, relation, and difference in psychoanalytic perspective. in The psychology of women: Ongoing debates M. Roth Walsh (Ed.), pp. 249-264.

Chodorow, N. (1989). Feminism and psychoanalytic theory New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Constantinople, A. (1979). Sex-role acquisition: In search of the elephant. Sex Roles, 5, 121-133.

Dinnerstein, D. (1976). The mermaid and the minotaur: Sexual arrangements and human malaise. New York: Harper Colophon.

Downs, A. C. (1983). Letter to Santa Claus: Elementary school-age children's sex-typed toy preferences in a natural setting. Sex Roles, 13, 9-19.

Fleishman, E. G. (1983). Sex-role acquisition, parental behavior, and sexual orientation: Some tentative hypotheses. Sex Roles, 9, 1051-1059.

Freud, S. (1925/1974). Some psychical consequences of the anatomical distinction between the sexes. In J. Strachey (Ed. and Tans), The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. 19, pp. 241-260) London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-analysis. (Original work published 1925).

Gurin, P. (1985). Women's gender consciousness, Public Opinion Quarterly, 49, 143-163.

Gurin & Markus (1989). Cognitive consequences of gender identity. In S. Skevington & D. Baker (Eds.) The Social identity of women, pp.152-172.

Horney, K. (1973). The flight from womanhood. In J. B. Miller (Ed.), Psychoanalysis and women (pp. 5-20). Baltimore, MD: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1926).

Kolhberg, L. (1966). A cognitive-developmental analysis of children's sex-role concepts and attitudes. In E. E. Maccoby (Ed.), The development of sex differences (pp. 82-173). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Lips, H. M. (1979). Sexual differentiation and gender identity. In H. M. Lips & N. L. Colwill (Eds.), The psychology of sex differences (pp. 51-79). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Lips, H. M. (1988). Sex and gender: An introduction (First Edition). Mountain View, California: Mayfeild press.

Lips, H. M. (1993). Sex and gender: An introduction (Second Edition). Mountain View, California: Mayfeild press.

Lips, H. M., (1991). Women, men and power. Mountain View, CA: Mayfeild Publishing Co.

Maccoby, E. E. & Jacklin, C. N. (1974). The psychology of sex differences. Standford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Money, J. & Erhardt, A. A. (1972). Man and woman, boy and girl. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

O'Heron, C. A. & Orlofsky, J. L. (1990) Stereotypic and nonstereotypic sex role trait and behavior orientations, gender identity, and psychological adjustment. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology. 58, 134-143.

Sherif, M., & Sherif, C. W. (1956). Groups in harmony and tension. New York: Harper.

Skevington, S., & Baker, D. (1989). The social identity of women. London: Sage Publications.

Spence J. T. (1985). Gender identity and implications for concepts of masculinity and femininity. In T. B. Sonderegger (Ed.), Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Psychology and Gender, 32, 59-96. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Spence, J. T. (1993). Gender-related traits and gender ideology: evidence for a multifactorial theory. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 64, 624-635.

Spence, J. T. & Helmreich, R. L. (1978). Masculinity and femininity: Their psychological dimensions, correlates, and antecedents. Austin and London: University of Texas Press.

Tajfel, H. (1981). Human groups and social categories. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social identity and intergroup relations. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Tajfel, H. (1978). Social Categorization, social identity and social comparison. In H. Tajfel, (Ed.), Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations. New York: Academic Press.

Urberg, K. A. (1982). The development of the concepts of masculinity and femininity in young children. Sex Roles, 8, 659-668.